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St. Matthias Episcopal Church

by Katherine Gillies

For this field trip I attended St. Matthias Episcopal Church located at 11300 West Huegenot Road Midlothian, Va. 23113. The service took place on Sunday October 25th at 8:30 am. The presiding official was Rev. Brenda S. Overfield.

The church itself is a dark red brick building with a steeple and bells that chime at the beginning and end of each service. There are long stained glass windows and bright red double doors. There is also an adjacent building used for youth ministries, Sunday school and AA/Al-Anon meetings.

Inside the sanctuary, there are rows of joined, padded wooden chairs with a place to kneel. The carpet is a deep red color. Above the altar is a large pipe organ that is flanked by two long drapes depicting the bounty of Christ. There are many candles and flowers on the altar itself. The lighting is dim and there are sconces suspended from the exposed beam vaulted ceilings. To the left of the altar is a podium and to the right is the choir set up and piano.

There were not very many people at this service. Most appeared to be older caucasian women. There were a few families and some children. Seemingly middle to upper class. The dress was business casual. I was greeted warmly and felt quite comfortable. I actually ran into a couple of people I know. One of them gave me some information and

background about the Episcopal faith. The word "episcopal" refers to Government of Bishops. The Episcopal faith walks the "middle-way" between Catholic and Protestant traditions. Episcopalians believe that the Holy Scriptures are the revealed word of God. The Nicene Creed which is recited in each service, is the basic statement of the belief in God. And, the two great sacraments given by Christ to the church are baptism and the Holy Eucharist.

The services started much like Catholic services. The opening hymn began, the church members stood. A procession of four people in white robes and the Reverend made their way to the altar. They were then seated to the left. The four people in the robes do not have special titles. They are just members of the church providing a service. One of them began the service by reciting the first reading which was Job 42: 1-6. The second reading, Hebrews 7: 23-28, was read and then members stood. The gradual hymn played while there was another procession from the side of the congregation to the center aisle carrying a cross and text. The reverend read the Gospel which was Mark 10: 46-52. She gave her sermon which had to do with how pride, desire, apathy, anger, fear and greed cause us to be blinded. To remove the blindness, we first have to admit to it and have an awareness that Jesus is there to help us. While the reverend is giving the sermon, she has a volunteer come up to visually symbolize the meaning by placing blindfolds for each of the "character defects"

over the volunteers head.

After the sermon, the Nicene creed was recited, prayers for the people was read, and the congregation then kneeled for the confession of sin. There was then a brief offering of peace among the congregation. The reverend then prepares the offering. She blesses and breaks the bread representing the body of Christ. She then blesses and pours the wine representing the blood of Christ. The members walk forward, kneel at the altar and receive communion. Real bread was given. The Benediction and closing prayer are read. While doing so, the candles are extinguished. A hymn is played while the reverend and four followers proceed to exit.

I found the whole service to be quite ritualistic. It is very regimented and practiced the same way each time. The act of reciting the Nicene creed, blessing the offering, receiving the offering, kneeling to confess sin, all of this is ritualistic and symbolic. We recite the prayers and creeds to symbolize our allegiance to Him. We kneel before Him to confess our sins and ask forgiveness. We take in His body and blood in the form of bread and wine to save our souls. The friend I ran into while there said to me that the Episcopal church is like Catholic Lite! This, I found to be true. •

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